



Enjoy the Seals, Avoid a Fine

Gray seals pull themselves out of the water and onto nearby sandbars and the beach to rest. Resting, also called “hauling out,” is an important activity for these marine mammals.

Human disturbance alters the natural behavior of seals. Noise, sudden movements, and people, boats, or pets getting too close can all disturb seals. When seals are disturbed they may return to the water as individuals or as a group. Seals that are continually approached never get a chance to rest, leaving them vulnerable to predators and illness.

Once hunted to near extinction, seals are now protected under the Marine Mammal Protection Act and National Park Service regulation. It is against the law to disturb or harass them.

To protect the seals and to avoid a fine of up to \$5,000 or six months in jail:

- Remain *at least* 150 feet from the seals. In some circumstances it is better to keep even farther away. Move back if the seals begin vocalizing, going into the water, or if all seal eyes are watching you.
- Observe from a distance with binoculars. Look for volunteers on duty at low tide to learn more about the seals.
- Keep pets on a leash. This is a national seashore regulation. Dogs are likely to startle a resting seal, causing an aggressive, defensive response that might injure your pet, you, or the seal.
- Do not approach haul out sites in boats or on boards. Kayaks, canoes, and SUP boards can elicit an alarm response and cause the seals to rapidly enter the water.
- Do not swim among seals. Seals can scratch and bite. Also, they are an important prey species for great white sharks which inhabit these waters.



It's normal for seals to be on land. Seals are semi-aquatic, meaning they often spend a portion of each day on land. Young seals may haul out on land for up to a week. Many seals have scratch marks and scars from hauling out; this is no cause for alarm.

Seals do not need to be wet constantly. They come onto land to get dry. Splashing or pouring water on them is a form of harassment.

Seals consume a variety of fish, shellfish, and crustaceans. They do not eat on land.

Gray seals have been nicknamed “horse heads” because of the long, straight slope of their profile. Males are dark brown, gray, or black with small, lighter spots. Females are tan or lighter gray with darker spots. Males may reach 8 feet in length and weigh over 700 pounds. Females average 6.5 feet and weigh up to 450 pounds.

Harbor seals have small heads, very large eyes, and a face that resembles a cocker spaniel. Males and females are about 5 feet long and can weigh up to 250 pounds. They are dark gray or tan, with many leopard-like spots.

If you see an entangled, sick, or injured seal, call 866-755-6622 or 508-743-9548.

